



Mississippi Department of  
Information Technology Services

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David C. Johnson, Executive Director

## Notice of Intent to Certify Sole Source

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**To:** Interested Parties

**From:** David C. Johnson

**CC:** ITS Project Number 46614

**Date:** August 24, 2021

**Re:** Sole Source Certification Number 4411 to provide Learning Blade supplemental system for the University of Southern Mississippi (USM)

**Contact Name:** Alec Shedd

**Contact Phone Number:** 601-432-8162

**Contact E-mail Address:** [Alec.Shedd@its.ms.gov](mailto:Alec.Shedd@its.ms.gov)

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### Sole Source Certification Award Details

Regarding Information Technology Services (ITS) Sole Source Certification Number 4411 for the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), please be advised that ITS intends to award SAI Interactive, Inc. d/b/a Thinking Media, as the sole source provider of Learning Blade supplemental system through June 30, 2022, in an amount not to exceed \$351,000.00. Should USM decide to renew its license/subscription for the Learning Blade supplemental system, this sole source certification shall be valid through June 30, 2024. Please be advised that ITS will determine if additional subscriptions or support are within scope during the certification period and may increase the spending authority accordingly. Should SAI Interactive, Inc. d/b/a Thinking Media change their name during this certification period, then ITS will determine if a recertification is necessary. For an explanation regarding Mississippi state law, policy and procedures for sole source procurements, refer to Attachment C: Sole Source Procurement Overview.

### Sole Source Criteria

1. The product or services being purchased must perform a function for which no other product or source of services exist:

**Learning Blade is a system of interactive online lessons, teacher lesson plans, and printable at-home activities for 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders specifically, where students learn about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers and technologies in the context of science, math, English, and social studies while explicitly practicing and demonstrating the relevance of middle school academic skills. Learning Blade's online lessons are aligned to current Mississippi academic standards, and the system produces reports tracking the progress of students in relationship to these standards by aligning specific questions within the system to Mississippi standards. Learning Blade also offers a unique Backpack app that**

allows students with Chromebooks to utilize the robust interactive lessons without an internet connection. The customer's sole source certification request is included as Attachment A.

2. The purchaser must be able to show specific business objectives that can be met only through the unique product or services:

The USM Equitable Access to STEM Content for Middle School Learners project provides high quality digital instructional materials aligned to Mississippi (MS) academic standards via online learning in a way that has been proven to increase the preparation and intent to follow pathways to high-demand STEM and computer science careers. Learning Blade provides minorities, girls, rural, and other under-represented students access to high quality STEM engagement and supports Perkins V CTE requirements for career exploration in middle grades. The STEM/CS Online Resources Subscription supports all schools (public/private), non-profits, and after schools in the state. The system produces reports tracking the progress of students in relationship to academic standards by aligning specific questions within the system to MS academic standards. According to USM's research Learning Blade has been proven to be an impactful and cost-effective means in providing STEM education resources to middle school students and has positively affected the interest and awareness in STEM careers for the states where it has been implemented. The customer's sole source certification request is included as Attachment A.

3. The product or services must be available only from the manufacturer and not through resellers who could submit competitive pricing for the product or services:

SAI Interactive, Inc. d/b/a Thinking Media is the creator and sole source distributor of the Learning Blade ® supplemental system for STEM career awareness. In addition, Thinking Media is the sole source for the licenses and associated services with Learning Blade. The Vendor's sole source certification letter is included as Attachment B.

#### **Schedule**

Task	Date
First Advertisement Date	08/24/21
Second Advertisement Date	08/31/21
Response Deadline From Objectors	09/08/21 at 3:00 P.M. Central Time
Notice of Award/No Award Posted	Not before 09/09/21

#### **Project Details**

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) Equitable Access to Science, Technology, Engineers, and Mathematics (STEM) Content for Middle School Learners project, funded through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) for Innovative Education Solutions is tasked with providing high quality digital instructional materials aligned to Mississippi academic standards via online learning in a way that has been proven to increase the preparation and intent to follow pathways to high-demand STEM and computer science careers. USM desires to procure the Learning Blade supplemental system for the State of MS schools.

#### **Submission Instructions and Format of Response from Objecting Parties**

Interested parties who have reason to believe that the Learning Blade supplemental system should not be certified as a sole source should provide information in the following format for the state to use in determining whether or not to proceed with awarding the Sole Source contract to SAI Interactive, Inc. d/b/a Thinking Media.

1.1 Interested Party Information

1.1.1 Contact Name, Phone Number and email address

1.1.2 Company Website URL, if applicable

1.2 Objection to Sole Source Certification

1.2.1 Interested parties must present specific objections to the Sole Source certification using the criteria listed above.

1.2.2 A statement regarding the Interested Party's capabilities as related to this Sole Source Certification Request.

1.3 Comments will be accepted at any time prior to Wednesday, September 8, 2021, at 3:00 p.m. (Central Time) to Alec Shedd at [Alec.Shedd@its.ms.gov](mailto:Alec.Shedd@its.ms.gov) or at the Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services, 3771 Eastwood Drive, Jackson, Mississippi 39211. Responses may be delivered by hand, via regular mail, overnight delivery, e-mail or by fax. Fax number is (601) 713-6380. ITS WILL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR DELAYS IN THE DELIVERY OF RESPONSES. It is solely the responsibility of the Interested Parties that responses reach ITS on time. Interested Parties may contact Alec Shedd to verify the receipt of their Responses. Responses received after the deadline will be rejected.

1.4 Interested Party responses should include the following information:

**SUBMITTED IN RESPONSE TO**  
**Sole Source Certification No. 4411-46614**  
**Accepted until September 8, 2021 @ 3:00 p.m.,**  
**ATTENTION: Alec Shedd**

If you have any questions concerning the information above or if we can be of further assistance, please contact Alec Shedd at 601-432-8162 or via email at [Alec.Shedd@its.ms.gov](mailto:Alec.Shedd@its.ms.gov).

Attachment A: Customer Sole Source Certification Request  
Attachment B: Vendor Correspondence  
Attachment C: Sole Source Procurement Overview

## Sole Source Certification Request

<b>Project Title:</b>		Learning Blade	
<b>Contact Information</b>			
<b>Agency/Institution:</b>		University of Southern Mississippi	<b>Contact Person:</b> Sally L. Downey
<b>Mailing Address:</b>		118 College Drive, Box 5181, Hattiesburg, MS 39406	<b>Phone Number:</b> 601-266-4315
			<b>Email Address:</b> <a href="mailto:Sally.L.Downey@usm.edu">Sally.L.Downey@usm.edu</a>
<b>MAGIC Customer #:</b> (Only required from state agencies)			<b>Division/Dept:</b>
<b>Project Summary</b>			
<b>Description of Project:</b> (Include details of original acquisition if applicable)		Learning Blade is a system of interactive online lessons, teacher lesson plans, and printable at home activities for 5 <sup>th</sup> to 9 <sup>th</sup> graders where students learn about STEM and computer science careers while reviewing academics. The effort will engage middle school students with 12 online missions that deal with societal issues and provide additional resources for teachers through professional development and lesson plans. In the Learning Blade system, students learn about the careers and technologies that solve these issues, and work through online academic lessons while demonstrating and practicing skills in that context. Lessons and resources are specifically written in the context of English, mathematics, social studies, and science and are aligned to Mississippi academic standards for ELA, math, science, social studies, and technology.	
ITS Acquisition Approval (CP-1) should be effective through this date:		06/30/2024	
<b>Cost Estimates</b> (Maximum allowed duration is 3 years per request/project)			
<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Initial Costs</b>	<b>Ongoing Costs</b>	<b>Time Constraints</b>
FY 2022	\$351,000.00		Item Needed by:
			Funds Expire:
			1 year
<b>Total Estimated Project Cost:</b>		\$351,000.00	
<b>Funding Source:</b> Grant Funds - Identify —>		Equitable Access to STEM Content for Middle School Learners grant	
<b>Discuss Funding:</b> (e.g. fund number; how much of needed funding is definite; total project budget; any matching or other non-state funds)		Project #8006741. Funding associated with this project, \$429,870.00, includes payment to Thinking Media for the Learning Blade program and funding for USM staff to provide leadership for the project and to evaluate effectiveness of the program.	
<b>Acquisition Details</b>			
<b>Item or Part Number</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Building Location(s)</b>
Learning Blade Subscription		Available statewide to support all schools (public/private), non-profits, after schools, etc. in the state	
<b>Describe Platform and Infrastructure:</b> Where does your agency plan to house or host the requested equipment or service? What resources currently available through ITS are needed (network connectivity, cloud computing/storage, colocation, business resiliency, etc.)?			
<b>NOTE: For equipment or services outside of current ITS available contracts and resources, justification must be attached.</b>			
Learning Blade is provided as a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), meaning that the system is hosted entirely by Thinking Media. Teachers and students access it through the Internet, and no installation of software is required on MS equipment. Access can be done through normal broadband Internet service in schools.			
<b>Sole Source Certification -</b> Certification must be renewed for each revision or continuation of previous Sole Source Approvals.			
<b>Explain why these products or services are the only ones that can meet your needs:</b> (Include specific functionality or special features that make this product or service unique.)		Learning Blade is a system of interactive online lessons, teacher lesson plans, and printable at-home activities for 5th to 9th graders specifically, where students learn about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers and technologies in the context of science, math, English, and social studies while explicitly practicing and demonstrating the relevance of middle school academic skills. Learning Blade's online lessons are aligned to current Mississippi academic standards, and the system produces reports tracking the progress of students in relationship to these standards by aligning specific questions within the system to MS standards. This resource provides minorities, girls, rural and other under-represented students access to high quality STEM engagement and supports Perkins V CTE requirements for career exploration in middle grades.	

	Learning Blade also offers a unique Backpack app that allows students with Chromebooks to utilize the robust interactive lessons without an Internet connection.			
Specific business requirements to be met by the products/services: (e.g. Intended use, how it helps accomplish a task, etc.)	The USM Equitable Access to STEM Content for Middle School Learners project provides high quality digital instructional materials aligned to Mississippi academic standards via online learning in a way that has been proven to increase the preparation and intent to follow pathways to high-demand STEM and computer science careers.			
Explain why this is the only entity that can provide the products/services: (Include other products/vendors researched or evaluated.)	SAI Interactive, Inc. d/b/a Thinking Media is the creator and sole source distributor of the Learning Blade * supplemental system for STEM career awareness. In addition, Thinking Media is the sole source for any services associated with Learning Blade.			
If for services or installations (not a product) the following two questions must be addressed.				
Vendor's proposal submitted:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (select only one)		Vendor's Certification of Sole Source attached:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>MAGIC Vendor Code(s)</b> - Vendor must be in MAGIC before a CP-1 can be issued.				
Place Order To Vendor Code: 3102092347	Vendor Name:	SAI Interactive Inc., dba Thinking Media	Remit To Vendor Code:	Vendor Name: SAI Interactive Inc., dba Thinking Media
	Vendor Address:	340 Frazier Ave. Chattanooga, TN 37405		Vendor Address: 340 Frazier Ave., Chattanooga, TN 37405

By my signature, I certify that, to the best of my professional knowledge: the requested product or services are a sole source as outlined in the ITS Procurement Handbook, Rule 207.2-013-030 Procurement Types: Sole Source, and as outlined in Mississippi Code annotated Section 31-7-13. In addition, I acknowledge that there is a charge for ITS procurement services associated with this request which will be billed to the requestor by ITS and that my agency/public university is responsible for these charges/costs.

David J. Sliman / CIO  
Name (Agency Head or Public University CIO)/Title

  
Signature

08/20/2021  
Date

Attachment B



August 10, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to certify that SAI Interactive, Inc. d/b/a Thinking Media is the creator and sole source distributor of the Learning Blade® supplemental system for STEM career awareness. In addition, Thinking Media is the sole source for the licenses and associated services associated with Learning Blade.

SAI Interactive's federal tax ID is 62-1839608. If you have any additional questions, please contact me at [sheila@thinkingmedia.com](mailto:sheila@thinkingmedia.com).

Sincerely,

Sheila C. Boyington - CEO-President

## Attachment C

The acquisition of information technology for all state agencies and institutions of higher learning (IHLs) is within the scope of the ITS law, found in Mississippi Code Section 25-53-1, et seq., and the policies and procedures established in accordance with this statute, found in the ITS Procurement Handbook posted on the ITS website ([www.its.ms.gov](http://www.its.ms.gov)).

ITS enabling legislation requires that information technology hardware, software and services be acquired in a manner that insures the maximum of competition among all manufacturers and suppliers of such equipment and services. Accordingly, ITS promotes full and open competition through the issuance of open specifications and the objective evaluation of Interested Party proposals to determine the lowest and best offering to meet an agency's or public university's business requirements. True competition protects the integrity and credibility of purchasing in the public sector and is essential in providing best value and adequate contractual protection for the purchasing entity. In certain limited situations, information technology acquisitions may be sole-sourced.

ITS utilizes the provisions of Public Purchasing Law for Sole Source and Emergency procurements of information technology. Mississippi Public Purchasing Law (Mississippi Code Section 31-7-13) specifies that noncompetitive items available from one source only be exempted from bid requirements (sole-sourced). ITS statute, in Section 25-53-5 (p), permits ITS to utilize provisions in Public Purchasing Law or regulations, when applicable.

Per Public Purchasing law, acquisitions must meet the following criteria to be authorized as sole source:

1. The product or services being purchased must perform a function for which no other product or source of services exists,
2. The purchaser must be able to show specific business objectives that can be met only through the unique product or services, AND
3. The product or services must be available only from the manufacturer and NOT through resellers who could submit competitive pricing for the product or services. The vendor's correspondence regarding this criterion for this project is included as Attachment B.

By policy as documented in the ITS Procurement Handbook, acquisitions of IT services must include the following information to be authorized as sole source:

1. An explanation about why the amount to be expended is reasonable, and
2. An explanation regarding the efforts by the purchaser to obtain the best possible price.

For state agencies, approval of all technology purchases with a lifecycle cost of \$5,000 or less, including sole source purchases, has been delegated to the agency. The ITS Procurement Limits Policies for Agencies (a section in the ITS Procurement Handbook) require a minimum of two competitive written bids or proposals for technology purchases with a lifecycle cost over \$5,000 but not over \$50,000 (not over \$25,000 for projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act). Since, for single source items, the procuring agency will be unable to obtain two written bids, ITS must certify all sole source acquisitions of information technology with a lifecycle cost greater than \$5,000.

Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs) or public universities have been delegated the authority to certify sole source procurements up to \$250,000 lifecycle cost under the ITS Procurement Limits Policies for IHLs (a section in the ITS Procurement Handbook). For the certification of sole source procurements delegated to the CIOs at public universities, the public university must follow ITS' Sole Source Procedure, including advertisement of the intent to award as sole source. Institutions certifying a sole source purchase must ensure the criteria listed above are met and documented in writing by the institution and the Interested Party prior to certifying a product or service as sole source. Sole source documentation must be reviewed and approved by the IHL's CIO for any sole-source certification

above \$5,000. All sole source documentation should be retained in the public university's procurement file. Sole source requests above \$250,000 lifecycle cost require ITS approval.

Other than the delegations outlined above, all sole source technology procurements must be certified by ITS. The customer's Sole Source Certification Request for this project is included as Attachment A.

ITS thoroughly reviews Sole Source Certification Requests, determining if competing products and/or services exist. If so, ITS conducts a competitive procurement. If ITS' review confirms the sole source, then a Sole Source advertisement is issued, giving other Interested Parties an opportunity to identify competing products and/or services. Based upon the results of the Sole Source advertisement, ITS will either certify the request as a sole source or conduct a competitive procurement.